

Nora's Night Out

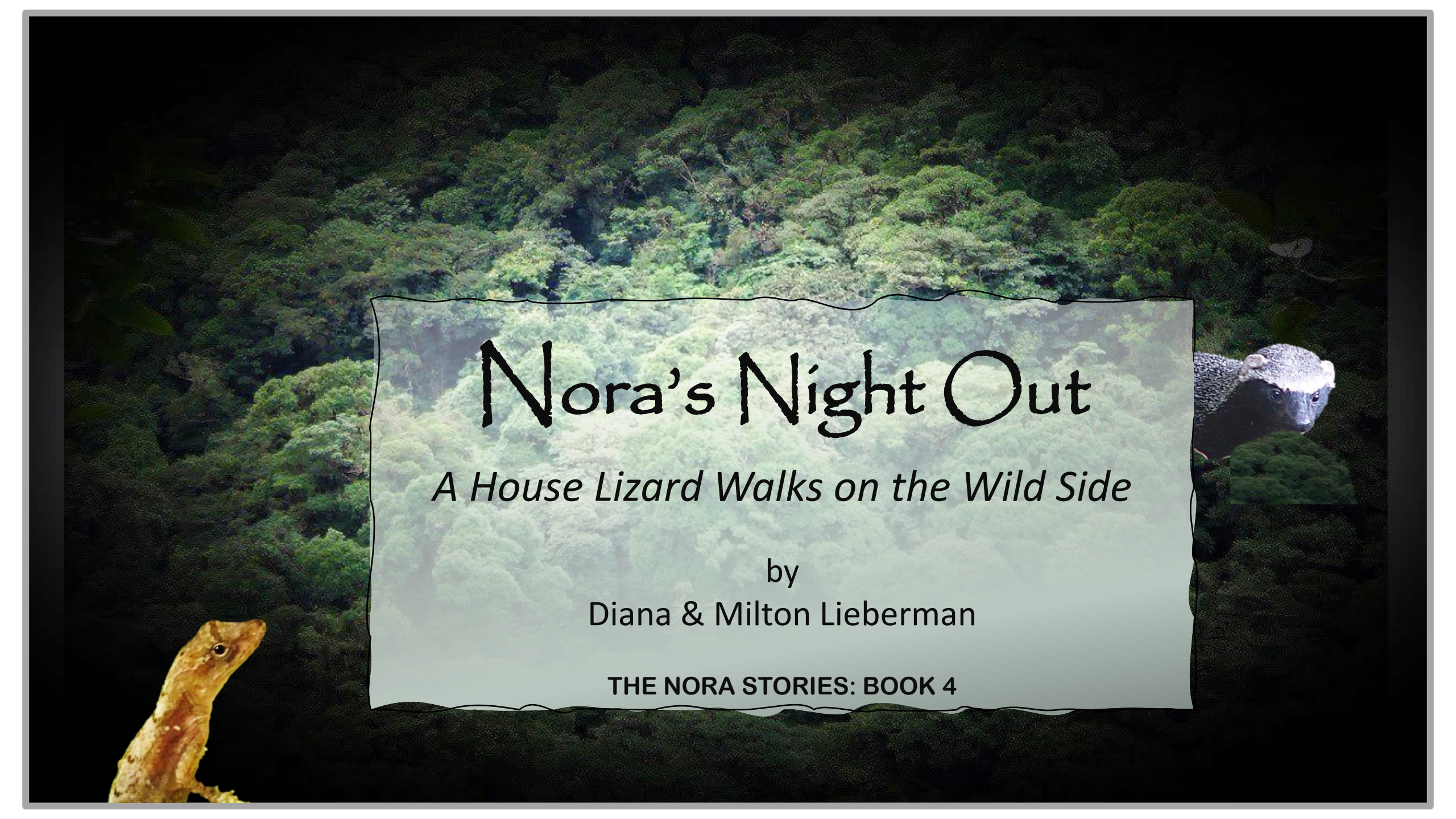
A House Lizard Walks on the Wild Side

by

Diana & Milton Lieberman

THE NORA STORIES: BOOK 4





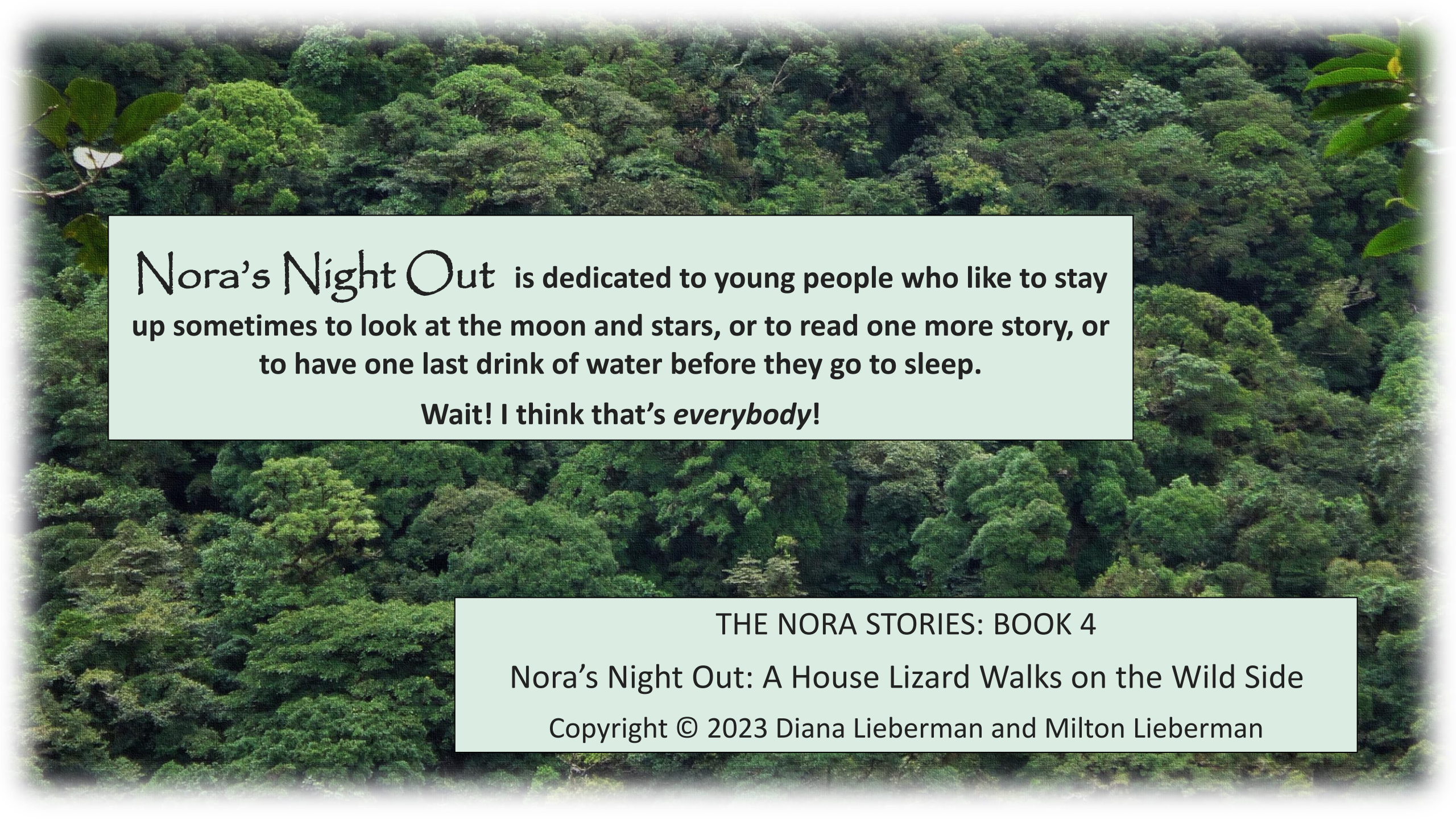
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Nora's Night Out is dedicated to young people who like to stay up sometimes to look at the moon and stars, or to read one more story, or to have one last drink of water before they go to sleep.

Wait! I think that's *everybody*!

THE NORA STORIES: BOOK 4

Nora's Night Out: A House Lizard Walks on the Wild Side

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PROLOGUE

Nora, the tiny Norops lizard, enjoys a tranquil life in the authors' bedroom as a house Norops, while Aron loves to be outdoors in the beauty of the tropical cloud forest which is their home. The two friends have faced momentous challenges and have learned important lessons about friendship, courage, acceptance, and the world around them.

Nora is still energized from her recent exploits. She feels ready to see more, learn more, and experience more.

Her mind awhirl, she wonders: "When we close our eyes, the world seems to go away – but it doesn't really, does it? What goes on out there in the dark forest while we sleep?"

Big questions for a tiny lizard! Fortunately, Aron is ready to join forces with her once again. They decide to venture into the night forest — come what may — and see for themselves.

Now Nora's lively curiosity is about to launch the two lizard friends on their most ambitious and risky adventure yet!

Read on to see how it happened...



I'll be honest with you: I LOVE to sleep.

I'm very good at it, like all Norops lizards.

This is me, Nora, by the way.

So I just climb up my bedroom curtain, hold on with my long toes, stretch out – head pointed down, which is the custom of my people – and close my eyes...

**** YAWN ****

But I'm a naturally curious animal, and I start to wonder...

What happens while we're asleep?

I ask my best friend Aron what he thinks...

*“When we close our eyes, the world seems to go away –
but it doesn’t really, does it?”*

*What’s it like OUT THERE when the sun goes down?
What happens in the forest when it’s dark?*

Is everyone asleep like us?

Or do some animals work nights?

THAT’S what I was wondering!”

**“Oh, wow!” says Aron. “That IS a great question!
Now I’m wondering too!**

But how are we going to find out?”



And as we do with all important decisions, we put our heads together and talk it over.

I say, "Maybe there is someone we could ask."

"Right," says Aron. "But... what if we stay up after sunset? We could go out and see for ourselves!"

"Well, maybe. But we're lizards, Aron. We sleep all night. Would we even be able to stay awake?"



"Suppose we rested during the day," he suggests.

I'm convinced. "OK! Let's DO it!" I say.

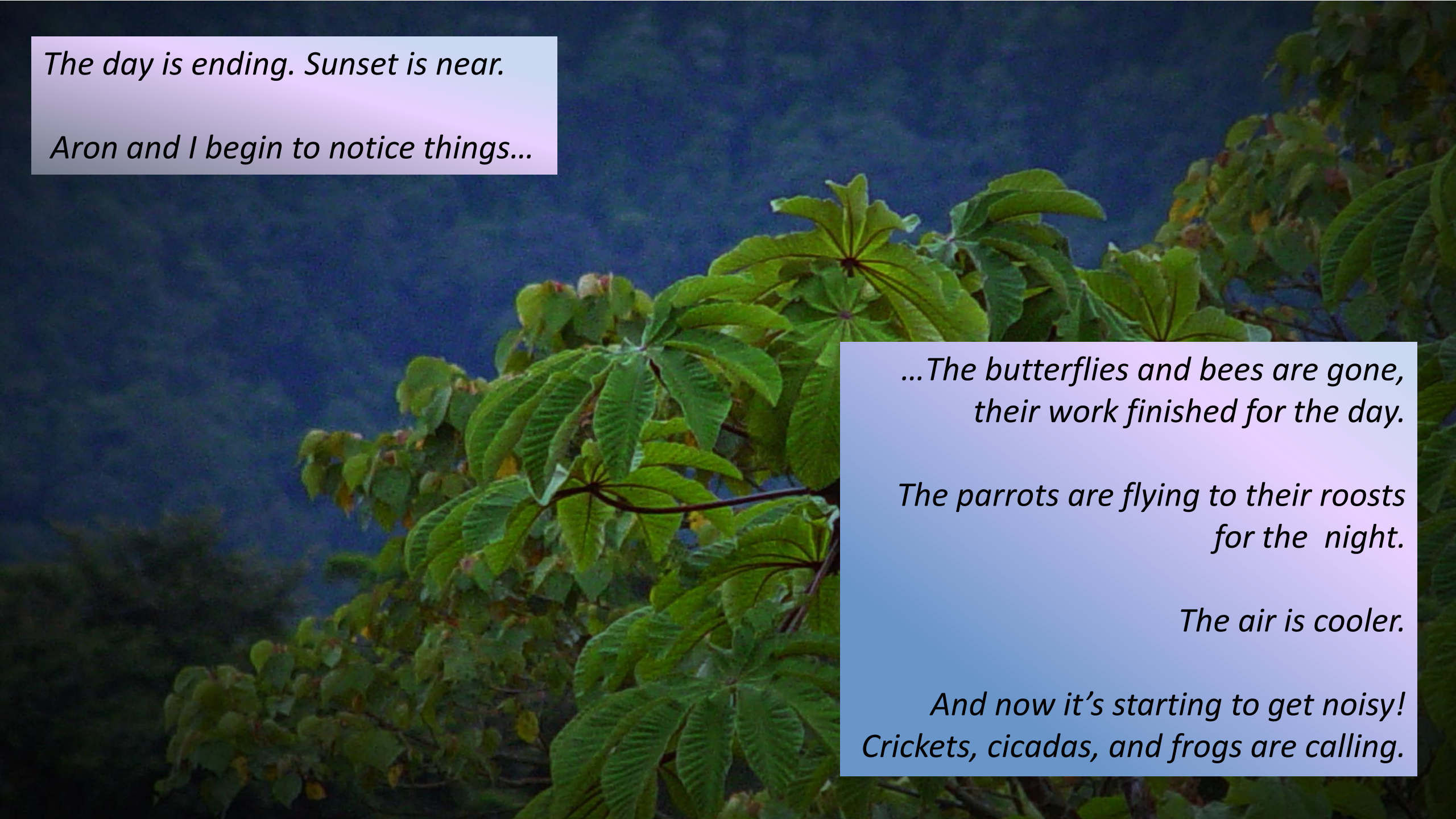
So we nap and doze for the rest of the day, and we get up just as the sun is getting low in the sky.

We have a quick snack of moths– we will need strength for our adventure!

Aron says, as he gulps one last moth, “It’s so easy for us to catch moths. They’re always asleep. I wonder why they never do anything.”

And I say, “Wait – maybe they get busy at night when we’re asleep! We’ll find out soon enough!”





The day is ending. Sunset is near.

Aron and I begin to notice things...

*...The butterflies and bees are gone,
their work finished for the day.*

*The parrots are flying to their roosts
for the night.*

The air is cooler.

*And now it's starting to get noisy!
Crickets, cicadas, and frogs are calling.*

*“Look, Aron!” I say. “The flowers are folding up their petals for the night!
Good night, flowers!”*



Aron says: “Flowers open up during the day so that insects can visit them; but the bees and butterflies are asleep now.”

Aron thinks for a moment, and then asks: “But do some flowers open up at NIGHT? And are there night animals that visit them?”

“Good question, Aron,” I say. “Let’s try to find out on our walk tonight.”





*The sunset is
magnificent, and we
watch quietly as the sky
lights up and the day
ends.*

*The sun dips below the
hills and is gone.*



Aron says, "This is it! Are you ready for our night out?"

I say, "Let's go!"

And off we go, into the dark night forest, best friends, small lizards full of curiosity and excitement....



As we start up the path, we see a small raccoon with a black mask and pretty black eyes.

“Hi, there,” he greets us. “I don’t think I know you. Are you new here?”

“We’re day animals,” I tell him. “We wanted to see the forest at night, so... here we are!”

“Ah!” says the raccoon. “A night hike! What fun! Enjoy yourselves!”

*We hear loud munching noises all around us.
Insects, chewing leaves! Grasshoppers, beetles,
caterpillars!
And leaves -- full of holes, all chewed up.*

**Aron says, “The forest at night is like a giant
salad bar for insects!**

**They eat and eat, but the forest keeps
growing, and there’s always more food for
tomorrow.”**

“Or for a second helping tonight!” I add.





“Look! It’s a huge frog,” says Aron.

“I am NOT!” says a raspy voice. “I am a TOAD!”

“Sorry,” I say. “We Norops lizards are day animals. We’ve never been out at night.”

“OK,” he says. “I’ll teach you.

LOOK at my dry skin; frogs are damp animals. **WATCH** me do short hops; frogs do giant leaps.

LISTEN! I say: **TOAD-TOAD-TOAD-TOAD-TOAD-TOAD-TOAD-TOAD** as fast as I can.

Frogs say: fraawgk?..... fraawgk? fraawgk? very slowly.”

“Got it! Thanks, Mr. Toad!” I say.

The toad blinks slowly and says, “Night is wonderful. I’m so glad you two decided to see it.”

“Oh, look, Nora-- there are leaf-cutter ants, still hard at work! They must work all day AND all night.”

“You know, Aron, my housemates are not very fond of the leaf-cutters. I hear them talking about it. They just wish the ants would leave the orange trees alone.”



“That makes sense,” says Aron. “There are so many other plants to choose from. But maybe they like the way orange leaves taste.”

“Oh, the ants don’t EAT the leaves. They take them to the nest and use them to grow fungus gardens. They DO eat the fungus.”

“Awesome! So the ants are like tiny farmers, growing their own food!”

“Exactly!” I show Aron a cut leaf. “You can see where they ants left their mark,” I say. “Look how the leaf pieces match the cuts in the leaves, like a jigsaw puzzle.”



“Pretty amazing,” he says. “Still, I’m sorry that the leaf-cutter ants make your housemates sad.”

“You lizards are very lucky!” says a new voice. “You picked an excellent night to come out.”

A head peeks out from the bushes. It’s a beautiful little gray fox!

Aron asks her: “You mean... nights are not all the same?”

“Oh, my goodness, NO!” exclaims the fox. “EVERY night is different. Look up! What do you see?”





Aron and I look up... we see the moon right above us--very big, very bright, and as round as a ball.

“Tonight we have the full moon,” the fox explains. “Every night the moon gets a bit smaller.

Later there will be just a tiny scrap left, like a baby’s fingernail. Then it’s called the new moon.”

We are amazed; we had no idea!

“Then what happens?” asks Aron.

“The moon gets bigger again, don’t worry!” laughs the fox. “The full moon comes back again every month.”





I am wondering: “Do you like the full moon best?”

The fox replies: “When the moon is very bright, I can see better, and it is easier for me to hunt mice.”

“So you catch more mice when the moon is full?”

“Nope,” she says. “The mice hide when the moon is full! They know to come out when I can’t see them as well!”

“What do you do if there are no mice out?” I ask.

“I just grab a grasshoppers or two. I manage!”

Aron says, “Thank you, kind fox. We are learning so much!”

This is turning into a tremendous night out! If only we could find some mice to talk to, we could hear their side of the story! Just then I hear a soft rustling noise at my feet.

*I look down and see a tiny deer mouse! “Hey! What are you doing out?” I ask him.
“Isn’t it safer for you to stay hidden when the moon is full?”*



“You’re right, I can’t stay out long. I just wanted a few seeds for my midnight snack. Don’t you ever feel like a midnight snack?”

“No,” I tell him. “Aron and I are day animals. We’ve never ever been up this late!”

“So – no snacks?” he asks us in amazement.

“Oh, we love snacks,” Aron says. “We eat snacks during the day. No seeds, though. We like moths and crickets.”

“Moths and crickets are good, too,” he says. “Well, got to keep moving, folks. Full moon, you know!”

“Yes,” I say. “We know.”

And off scampers the mouse, busy gathering his small snack.



Suddenly Aron stops, sniffs gently, and says, “Nora, what is that wonderful smell? Do you smell it too? It’s coming from your housemates’ coffee trees.”

I raise my nose and sniff. The air is heavy and sweet with a rich scent. I look around.



There are masses of white flowers opening up on the coffee trees! What a rich, sweet smell!

The flowers are pure white, not like the colorful flowers of daytime.

And the smell is stronger and heavier than any daytime flower.



“YES!” I say to Aron. “It’s the answer to your question. Some flowers DO open at night. And they’re white and sweet-smelling, not colorful like daytime flowers.”

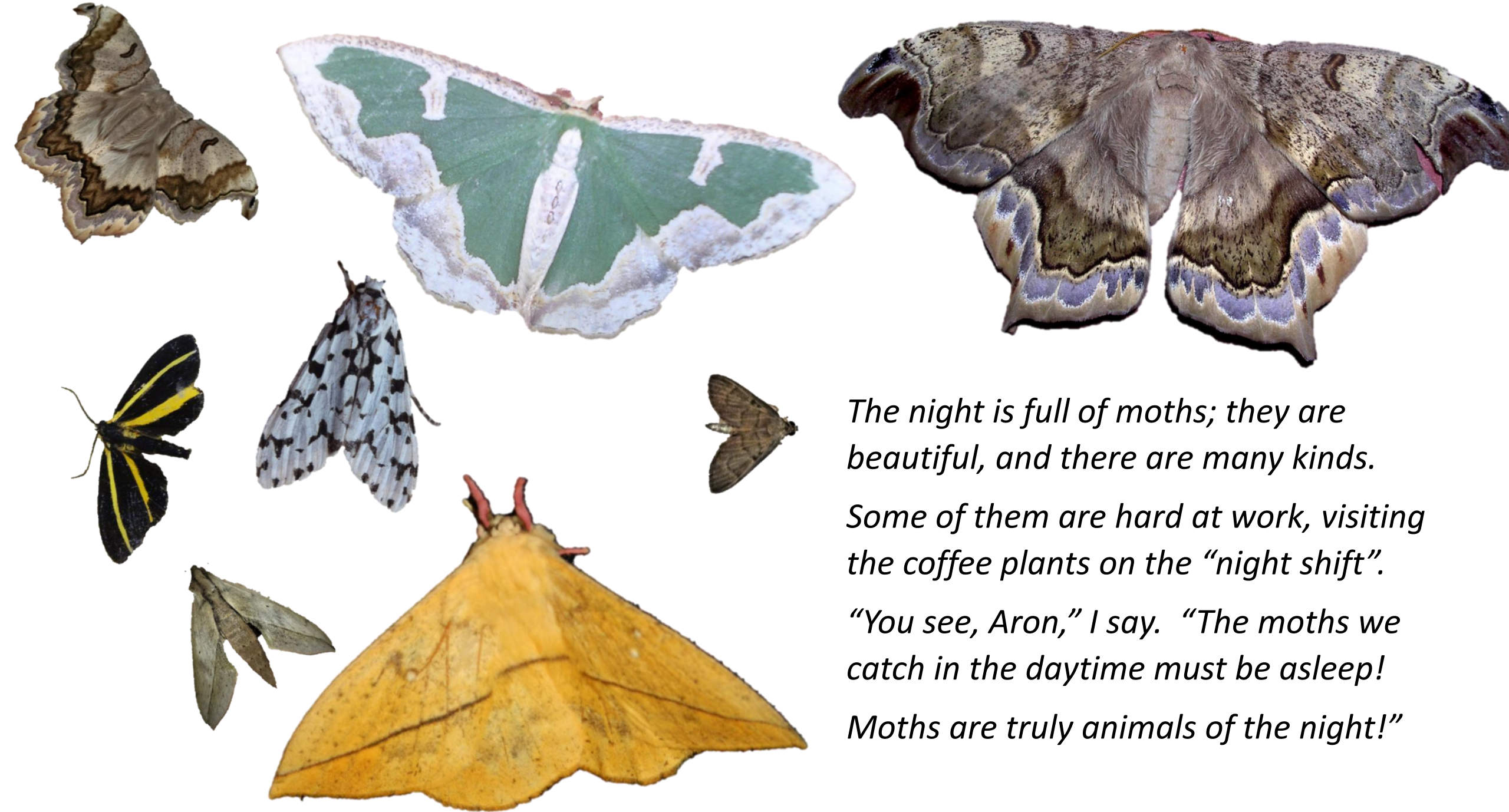


And as we watch, bats come, and then moths come, all attracted to the flowers by the wonderful smell.



Aron laughs and says, “I get it! Different flowers open up at different times.

The bees and butterflies work the day shift, and the moths and bats work nights!”



The night is full of moths; they are beautiful, and there are many kinds. Some of them are hard at work, visiting the coffee plants on the “night shift”. “You see, Aron,” I say. “The moths we catch in the daytime must be asleep! Moths are truly animals of the night!”

Suddenly we hear a very loud “SNOINKH! SNOINKH!” sound --- almost like a sneeze! We peer into the forest. Who... or what....could it be?





I see her first. "It's a pig! A wild pig!"

"Oh, please!" she grunts, and a large animal with short legs and bristly fur appears. "Do NOT call me a pig. I am a Javelina. I am sometimes called a Collared Peccary. But, please, do NOT call me a pig."

"Javelina is a pretty name," I tell her. "We are Norops lizards; some people call us anoles... but we have never been mistaken for pigs!" I laugh. It's just a silly little joke.

But Aron and the javelina start giggling too, and soon we are all three laughing and snorting and falling over. (We sound like pigs, if I may say so!)



And suddenly, she is gone! The javelina bounds into the forest like a shot, the bristles on her back raised in alarm. What frightened her, I wonder!

Something is different. Aron notices it first.

“Listen!” he says. “Nothing’s moving. The animals have stopped their chatter.”



Aron’s right.

*I look up slowly, and there among the branches
I think I see a face.*

“A grison!” whispers Aron. “A huge weasel. I have heard that they are ferocious predators!”

He looks at me: “Do we run? Do we just stand very still? You decide, Nora!”



I think for a moment. “It’s always good to be polite. Let’s greet him and let him know we are friendly. We can always run away later if we have to!”

“Good evening, Mr. Grison,” I call out in my biggest voice. “Are you enjoying the full moon?”

“Who’s that? I can’t see you!” the grison replies.

“It’s Nora, and my friend Aron. We’re Norops lizards, and...”



“Norops?” he interrupts with a chuckle. “At this hour? Ha ha! Shouldn’t you day kids be tucked in for the night? Ha ha ha!” and he laughs so hard he has to hold his side.

Aron says, “We came out for a walk because we wanted to know about nighttime. It’s been amazing!”

“You must be curious and brave to do that,” the grison replies. “Come stand where I can see you.”

*We take a few steps forward.
“Now you can see us, but we really can’t see you,” I tell him.*



“Of course not!” he says. “In the forest at night I’m nearly invisible. No matter-- I know I’m not especially handsome!” He moves into the open, where we can see him.

He is a magnificent creature, sleek and elegant, and we tell him so. We admire his shining black eyes, stylish white headband, and fine gray hoodie, too!

“You are very kind,” he says. “Most creatures fear me and don’t take the time to know me. I have enjoyed our chat. What will you do now, little Noropses?”



I look at Aron. “We’re tired. We should get home. But it has been an unforgettable night out. We are honored to have so many new friends. We will never forget you. And we have learned so much!”

“Be safe, little guys,” says the grison. “If you ever need me, I’ll be around!”

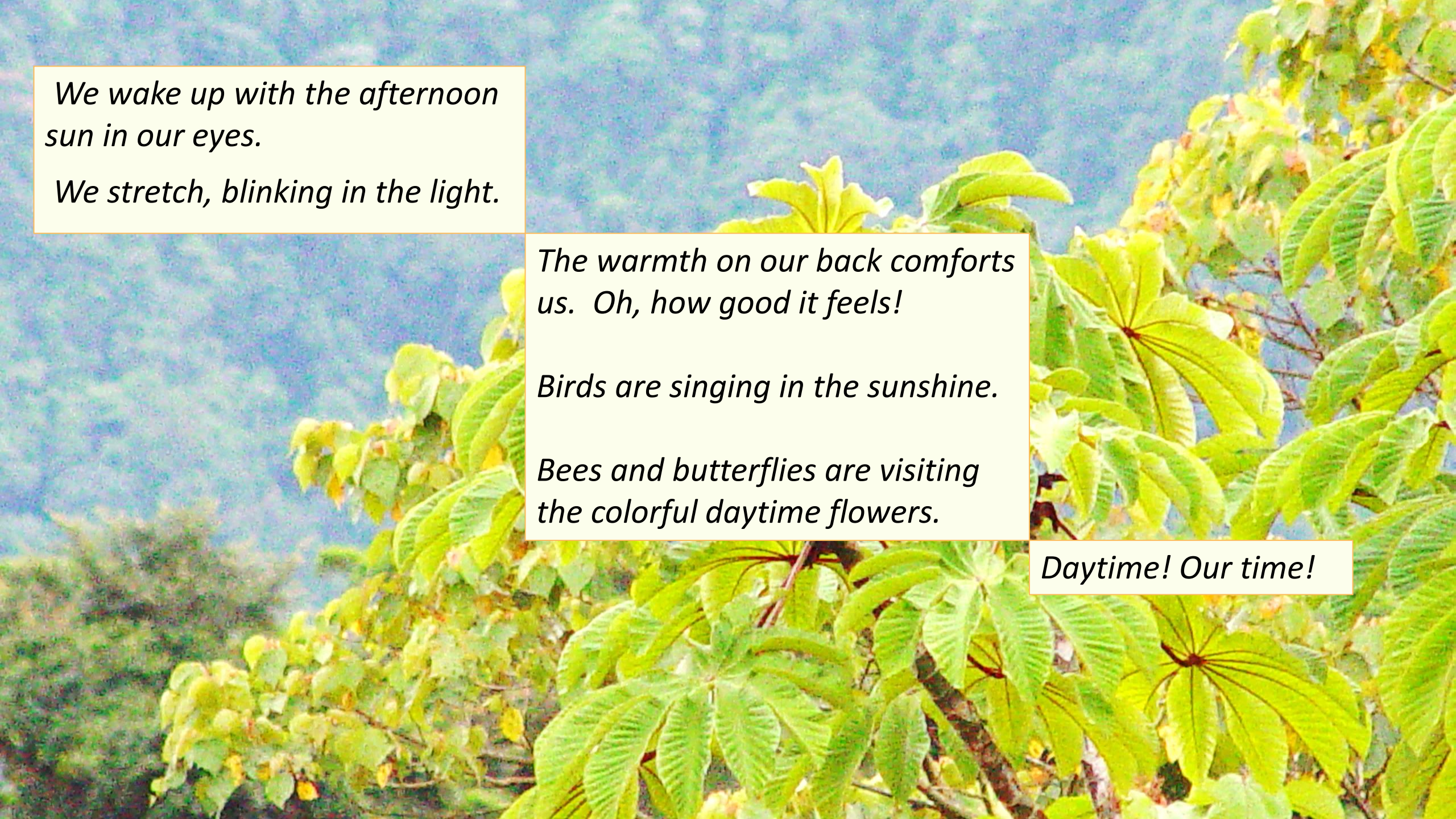


Weary from our long night out, we make our way home.

We reach the back porch as the moon is setting. A new day will start soon.

We fall asleep instantly.

Relaxed even down to our toes, we sleep deeply, the way that very small animals and very small people do.



*We wake up with the afternoon
sun in our eyes.*

We stretch, blinking in the light.

*The warmth on our back comforts
us. Oh, how good it feels!*

Birds are singing in the sunshine.

*Bees and butterflies are visiting
the colorful daytime flowers.*

Daytime! Our time!



*Daytime is bright and warm and
full of color and activity.*

*And now we know that night is dark and
cool and full of sounds and sweet smells
and --yes!-- activity.*



Here is what Aron says:

**“We are day animals, Nora, but
the night is awesome too!”**



I agree!

*One thing is certain:
we will do it again some day!*

Good night!



HERE IS SOME MORE INFORMATION FOR YOU FROM NORA AND ARON!

What is a Norops lizard?

Lizards are reptiles that have four legs and a tail. Norops lizards have an especially long tail. Their body and head is covered with small scales. They shed their skin from time to time as they grow. They lay eggs. They have long toes with a claw at the end of each toe. Norops lizards are sometimes called anoles.

What do Norops eat?

Norops lizards feed on tiny insects and spiders which they swallow whole. Moths, crickets, and beetles are especially favored. As lizards grow, they eat larger prey.

When are Norops lizards most active?

Norops lizards are diurnal animals, which means they are active during the day. Nocturnal animals are active at night; crepuscular animals are active around sunrise and sunset.

Would it be too cold for a Norops lizard be out at night?

Lizards do not handle temperature changes very well; they are “cold-blooded” or “poikilothermic”. Their internal temperature is not stable, but changes with the surroundings. If a lizard is in a cool environment, its internal body temperature drops, and it moves slowly. Norops lizards live outdoors day and night (although Nora sleeps in our bedroom!) In tropical habitats like ours, overnight temperatures do not drop too much; nighttime temperatures here are not dangerous for a small lizard.

Do plants really go to sleep at night?

Not the way you do; however, plants have day-night rhythms or cycles. Plants capture sunshine as an energy source (“photosynthesis”), so some plant activities happen in the daylight, and other things happen at night. Flowers may open in the day and close at night (or the other way around). Some leaves do close up at night.

Is the forest at night really a “giant salad bar” for insects?

Yes, in a way. Most of the herbivory (plant feeding) in a tropical forest is by insects, and most of it happens at night. Take a look at the plants that live near you and see how many have holes or chewed edges from insects or other herbivores.

Why do insects and other animals visit flowers?

Many flowers use bees, butterflies, moths, bats, or other creatures to spread their pollen so they can produce seeds. Colorful petals (of daytime flowers) or sweet smells (of nighttime flowers) attract visitors; the flower provides sweet nectar and sometimes pollen as a reward or “payment” for the visit. Insects have excellent color vision and can easily see bright flower petals. Bats and other small mammals which visit white flowers at night have poor color vision but can easily detect fragrances of night-blooming flowers.

What are some of the flowers that open at night?

Gardenias, camellias, orange blossoms, jasmine, moonflowers, and even some cactus plants open their white flowers at night and have strong, sweet fragrances. When you visit a flower market or florist’s shop, try to notice the strong sweet smell of these species.

Butterflies are diurnal (day active) and moths are usually nocturnal (night-active). How can you tell the difference between moths and butterflies?

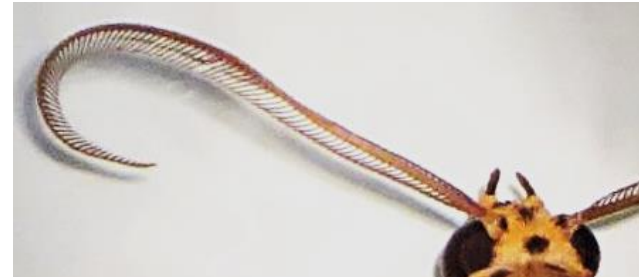
Here are three ways to tell them apart: (1) Look closely at their antennae (feelers)– butterfly antennae have a small knob at the end, while moth antennae are feathered or brushy looking. (2) Look at how they rest-- moths keep their wings open at rest, while butterflies fold the wings over their back. (3) Note when they are active– moths are generally active at night, while butterflies are active during the day (oh, wait– you knew that already!)



Butterfly with knobbed antennae



Moth with feathery antennae



How important are the phases of the moon (lunar phases) to plants and animals?

Very important! A lunar cycle takes 28 days (about one month). Animal behavior varies with phases of the moon. Gardeners and farmers have known for tens of thousands of years that planting and harvesting and pruning of plants works best during certain lunar phases.

Why aren't any animals active all the time -- both during the day and the night?

Everybody needs to sleep sometime. Even you!

HERE ARE YOUR QUESTIONS! Ready?

Are you nocturnal (active at night), crepuscular (active at sunrise and sunset), or diurnal (active by day)?

Do you sometimes look at the moon and the stars at night?

Have you seen how the moon looks different at different times— sometimes it is a round, full moon, or a crescent moon, or a half-moon? How could you find out what phase the moon is in right now?

The lizard friends met many nocturnal creatures. Which ones did you like? Were there any you did not like?

Are there nocturnal animals near you? Moths? Raccoons? Spiders? Frogs or toads? Bats? Mice? Fireflies?

Many people work at jobs on the night shift. Do you know anyone who works nights?

Where you live, are the sounds at night different from the sounds during the day?

What sounds do you hear at night? Insects? Rain? Dogs? People? Wind? Cars? Music? Frogs? What else?

Have you noticed the sweet smell of flowers at a market or florist's shop?

If you want to know something do you ask people? Read about it in books or online? Find out on your own?

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Drs. Diana & Milton Lieberman

We live in the mountains of Costa Rica on a small coffee farm. We are tropical biologists who do research and write articles about tropical forests and trees. We teach biology and research methods to university students.

In the morning we like to sit on the back porch and watch the wild creatures that come to visit. During the day, the doors of the house are open, and small animals sometimes walk right in! That is how we met Nora.

We enjoy all the creatures that make their home here (except, perhaps, the leaf-cutter ants, which attack our orange trees).

We often walk at night. The tropical air is heavy with the scent of night flowers, and the crickets and frogs are loud. We are sometimes startled by an owl or a javelina or a beautiful gray fox. Nighttime is a different world, a wonderful one.

We have enjoyed knowing Nora and Aron, photographing them, and living as their housemates. We hope you like them as much as we do.

